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MONITORING OF INTERNATIONAL PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION

Major issues and programme activities of the Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development and welfare and specific social groups

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Social welfare and social development activities of the regional commissions for the biennium 1989-1990

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CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION		1	3
I.	ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE	2-6	3
	A. Social development and welfare	2-3	3
	B. Aging	4	3
	C. Family issues	5-6	4
II.	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	7-32	4
	A. Social development and welfare	7-15	4
	B. Youth	16-18	5
	C. Aging	19-21	6
	D. Disabled persons	22-24	7
	E. Substance abuse prevention and rehabilitation	25-28	7
	F. Education for all	29-32	8
III.	ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	33-45	9
	A. Social development and welfare	34-39	9
	B. Youth	40-43	11
	C. Aging	44-45	11
IV.	ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA	46-60	12
	A. Social development and welfare	46-50	12
	B. Youth	51-54	14
	C. Aging	55-57	15
	D. Disabled persons	58-60	15

INTRODUCTION

1. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1981/20 of 6 May 1981, in which the Council requested the regional commissions to report to the Commission for Social Development at its biennial sessions on social welfare and social development activities, four of the regional commissions have provided the information set out in sections I-IV below. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has advised the Secretariat that it is unable to report on its activities, given the current circumstances in the region.

I. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

A. Social development and welfare

2. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) is engaged in a long-term research effort, recently initiated, to collect and analyse information on the various population-related social and economic policies in the majority of the ECE countries. The project currently focuses on policies related to fertility and family, and international migration, as well as the elderly and aging, but may be extended in the future to include other relevant policies. The long-term objective is to monitor shifts in population-related policies in countries of the various subregions, such as the European Community or central and eastern Europe, as these subregions undergo major institutional, political or economic reforms.

3. The Conference of European Statisticians, a principal subsidiary body of ECE, engages in a number of activities related to social development. In September 1990 it convened at Ottawa an intergovernmental meeting on the demographic and economic consequences and implications of changing population age structures. The meeting was organized in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the topics discussed at the meeting included causes of changes in the age structure, consequences of changes in the age structure for public revenues and expenditure, and implications for the labour force of changing population age structures. Other activities in the ECE programme of work for future years may also be of interest, such as the publication on short-term and long-term international migration flows within the ECE region and between ECE countries and other regions (planned for 1992), the publication of a statistical volume on the situation of women (and men) in the ECE region (planned for 1993), and the publication of a statistical volume containing basic tables from the 1990 round of population and housing censuses in the ECE region (also planned for 1993).

B. Aging

4. With the support of UNFPA, ECE is carrying out research into various aspects of population change in the countries of the region and their interaction with social and economic development. The work includes finalization of a volume entitled Advanced Population Aging in Europe and North America: Economic and Demographic Aspects, which will incorporate studies on demographic aspects of population aging and its impact on the economy, public spending and the labour market. It also includes preparations for further research into demographic characteristics and social and economic conditions of the elderly in the ECE countries, which may be studied on the basis of microdata census samples of households having at least one elderly member, to be drawn from population censuses taken in or around 1990.

C. Family issues

5. ECE took part in the International Conference on Aging Populations in the Context of the Family, held from 15 to 19 October 1990 at Kitakyushu (Japan), which was organized by the United Nations Secretariat (Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division) and the municipal government of Kitakyushu, in collaboration with, among others, the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. In its contribution to the Conference, entitled "Changing patterns of first marriage, divorce and remarriage in Europe and North America", ECE summarized early findings, pertaining to women, of its larger ongoing study of post-second-World-War trends in marriage formation and dissolution in the countries of the ECE region. For a number of countries since the 1960s, the findings indicate a decline in the number of first marriages, associated with increases in the number of divorces and a decline in the incidence of remarriage among divorced persons.

6. In view of the recent major changes in family formation and dissolution, as well as continued low fertility in most countries of Europe and North America, ECE is promoting internationally comparable surveys on family and fertility behaviour. Possibly 10 or more countries may make such surveys in the period 1991-1995, using a common approach and questionnaire that are now being developed by the ECE. The survey data would become the basis for cross-country comparative analyses of determinants of this behaviour, including the effects of selected social policy measures related to the family and human reproduction.

II. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

A. Social development and welfare

1. Major issues and recent developments

7. During the past four decades, the development strategies adopted by most countries of the Asia and Pacific region have been based on a unisectoral approach, which emphasized economic growth as the main instrument to eradicate poverty. A sizeable majority of the developing countries have achieved striking growth rates. Paradoxically, the number of people living in absolute poverty has actually increased. Approximately nine tenths of the world's absolute poor live in the region covered by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

8. The approach to social issues that stems from this "economistic" approach to development tends to be ad hoc and crisis-management-oriented. The economistic approach means that the ultimate costs of development are shouldered by those segments of society least able to bear them. In the pursuit of short-term economic gains, the long-term consequences of a style of economic development that neglects social issues are ignored.

9. While there have been important exceptions, many developing countries of the region have neglected public participation in development decision-making. One outcome is that many countries have encountered difficulties in adjusting to rapid technological change in their efforts to industrialize and modernize. Inadequate attention to human needs and the conditions influencing subjective

well-being in development planning and programming has been associated with social alienation and civil unrest in some parts of the region.

10. The rate of rural-urban migration has accelerated throughout the ESCAP region as people search for remunerative work opportunities and the other widely advertised "benefits" of urban life. This has profoundly affected family function and structure in both sending and recipient communities. New policy approaches are called for that will tackle imbalances in the strains imposed on the weakest family members, particularly among the poorer sections of society.

11. Social development policy and planning in the region has conventionally dealt with social issues on a piecemeal basis. A policy approach that treats each issue separately has resulted in the creation of a plethora of government offices to deal with individual social concerns.

12. There is an emerging appreciation of the need to adopt a comprehensive and integrated policy approach to social development in the region. This approach recognizes the fundamental importance of intersectoral co-ordination at all stages of the planning cycle - national policy formulation, sectoral and subnational strategy development, programme formulation and implementation, and continuous monitoring, evaluation and upgrading of policies. Co-ordination is essential both horizontally across sectors and vertically between the central and local levels.

13. ESCAP has requested the Secretariat to provide regional support to national efforts to develop viable strategies to integrate social concerns and the human dimension into overall development policy and planning as a means of ensuring progress and stability in the region.

2. Activities of ESCAP

14. Social development policy and co-ordination. A project to formulate a regional social development strategy to the year 2000 and beyond has been initiated by ESCAP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project is structured around the three themes of distributive justice, eradication of poverty and popular participation. A draft strategy will be presented to the Fourth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Welfare and Social Development, to be held at Manila in October 1991.

15. An analytical survey of the quality of life in the ESCAP region is in progress. Methodological studies to design the survey framework have been completed. The survey is a major ESCAP activity in implementation of the Jakarta Plan of Action on Human Resources Development in the ESCAP Region, adopted by the Commission at its forty-fourth session in April 1988. 1/

B. Youth

1. Major issues and recent developments

16. Few countries in the ESCAP region have as yet developed an explicit national youth policy. Among the countries that have national youth policies, there are significant differences. In large part, the differences reflect unevenness in the sophistication and comprehensiveness of the youth policies *per se*. Moreover, as countries in the region move towards more sophisticated

and comprehensive national youth policies, they may run the risk of detaching youth policy from the larger national development plan and policies.

17. The provision of adequate training for young people in the region is of particular concern because of the relatively high incidence of illiteracy, unemployment and drug abuse among young people compared with older age groups. While there has been a quantum jump in the outreach of youth training programmes in the past decade, several issues do not appear to have been dealt with adequately. These include: (a) the quantitative sufficiency of youth training efforts compared with the magnitude of the need for training; (b) access by young women to training opportunities outside gender-stereotyped roles and occupations; and (c) integration of the diverse training efforts into a coherent policy to develop youth's resources.

2. Activities of ESCAP

18. Participation of youth in development. Youth projects include the following: a project to analyse national experiences of human resource development policies pertaining to youth; efforts to strengthen youth organizations in the promotion of functional literacy; a seminar on the effects of new technologies on the working life of young people; training workshops for trainers in youth work; and a seminar and field study on programmes to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents.

C. Aging

1. Major issues and recent developments

19. In consideration of policies and programmes to enhance the participation of elderly persons in development in the ESCAP region, distinctions need to be made between responses to: (a) the current situation of elderly persons in the region compared with the situation of elderly persons 30 to 40 years into the future, based on projected development trends; and (b) the condition of elderly persons who are well-integrated into family and community life compared with those who are dislocated from family and kinship networks, and are destitute or disabled.

20. From a regional perspective, the prospects for aging societies are much more significant than the current situation would suggest. As the majority of the developing countries in the ESCAP region still have some 30-40 years before their societies will be considered "aged", the 1990s present an appropriate decade for the initiation of pre-emptive policy and programme responses. Serious preparation for the continued economic, social and political participation of elderly persons must involve comprehensive efforts affecting the entire life span of individuals, particularly covering health maintenance, skill development and income support.

2. Activities of ESCAP

21. Participation of the elderly in development. To catalyse action in the region to promote life-time preparation for the aging of societies, ESCAP is preparing a study on policy issues and proposals for action. A project proposal has been prepared on the integration of elderly persons in development planning. The project is aimed at facilitating regional exchanges among policy and programme personnel to deal more effectively with this newly emerging issue.

D. Disabled persons

1. Major issues and recent developments

22. Widespread ignorance, aversion and stigmatization act as barriers to the social integration of people with disabilities. Those barriers block access to education, training, employment, social and cultural participation and the exercise of full citizenship. The physical environment in most countries of the region is not designed to facilitate the spatial mobility and socio-economic independence of people with disabilities. Greater public recognition needs to be given to the fact that these impediments are a fundamental problem to be dealt with by society rather than by disabled people individually. The tendency in developing countries in the region is for disability issues to be accorded low priority and to be dealt with in a single ministry.

23. There is a need for regional technical co-operation activities to support the self-determination and self-help of people with disabilities, especially through stimulating the removal of physical and social environmental barriers.

2. Activities of ESCAP

24. Participation of disabled persons in development. To support the self-help movement of people with disabilities in the region, ESCAP has undertaken follow-up activities to a project to assist national disability prevention and rehabilitation programmes in the least developed countries through technical co-operation among developing countries. A multi-year project of assistance in the development of self-help organizations of disabled persons was initiated in 1990. A regional public awareness campaign on disability issues is planned to mark the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons and to generate further action beyond it.

E. Substance abuse prevention and rehabilitation

1. Major issues and recent developments

25. Demand for illicit drugs is growing rapidly in the ESCAP region. The problem takes on particular seriousness because of its wide social repercussions, especially with respect to crime, prostitution and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). There is a growing recognition that the drug abuse problem in the ESCAP region not only relates to illicit drugs but extends to various licit drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco. It has been asserted that in many countries of the region alcohol and nicotine do more harm than do all the illicit drugs combined.

26. The potential increase of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and AIDS in the ESCAP region is comparable to that in Africa. The professional sex industry is highly developed in some countries of the region. Prostitutes and drug users, many of whom are also intravenous drug users, are overlapping populations. Moreover, as there is a very high correlation between alcohol use and dangerous sexual practices, alcohol must be taken into consideration in AIDS-related policies.

27. Discouraging results from efforts to control supply in the region are leading to an increase in the attention being given to the control of the demand for drugs as a complementary strategy. Recent experience indicates

that efforts to control demand must be broadly based. They must take fully into account the human costs associated with rapid social change as an important causal factor in drug abuse. Experience also suggests that efforts to control the demand for drugs should be integrated into broad social development policies to encourage the assumption of personal responsibility and a productive role for individuals in a smoothly functioning society.

2. Activities of ESCAP

28. Health and development. Since 1988, ESCAP has undertaken several projects to control the demand for drugs. They concern the development of data and information systems for use in demand control; study of drug abuse rehabilitation processes in the region; assistance in the development of drug abuse prevention programmes; and promotion of integrated community-based drug abuse programmes to control the demand for drugs.

F. Education for all

1. Major issues and recent developments

29. While the percentage of illiterate persons in the ESCAP region has decreased over the past 15 years, the absolute numbers have increased. Male illiteracy has decreased but the number of female illiterates has risen, reflecting the persistence of social and cultural constraints on female participation. The trend is towards an increase in the numbers of out-of-school children and youth, especially among the rural poor. Unbalanced investment in favour of tertiary academic education has resulted in a problem of unemployment among graduates in many ESCAP countries, alongside a shortage of skilled vocationally trained labour.

30. There are large differences in educational attainment levels both among and within countries of the region: nine developing countries in the region have achieved 80 per cent or higher literacy rates; seven have literacy rates below 50 per cent; South Asian female illiteracy rates far exceed those in East and South-East Asia; it is estimated that rural literacy rates lag 20 percentage points behind those for urban areas in many countries in the region.

31. ESCAP, at several recent sessions, has called attention to the grave implications of the illiteracy problem in the region for social equity and human resource development. To remedy the problem, the focus of education planning will have to shift from the macro level to take full account of the local situation of learners. Literacy programmes will have to be designed with greater learner participation and be of practical relevance in improving the lives of learners.

2. Activities of ESCAP

32. Literacy and basic education. To assist the countries of Asia and the Pacific in following up the decisions reached at the World Conference on Education for All, convened at Jomtien (Thailand) in March 1990, ESCAP has initiated a regional follow-up project with the collaboration of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The project focuses on preparation of a programme of action to support education for all in the region.

III. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

33. During the biennium 1989-1990, the work programme of the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was oriented towards two fundamental objectives: (a) the analysis of the role and functions of member States and other social agents and the elaboration of social policies coherent with the characteristics of each national situation; and (b) the integration of women into the economic and social development of Latin America and the Caribbean. The execution of the programme was carried out through four programme elements: changes in social structure and identification of agents of development; styles of development; social policies in a time of crisis; and the integration of women into development.*

A. Social development and welfare

1. Major issues and recent developments

34. The major issues in the region concerning social development and welfare were the promotion of development with social equity and the management of the economic and social crisis by Governments greatly affected by the problem of external debt and the reduction of their public expenditure. As a consequence of the crisis and growing popular discontent, the question of democracy and the relation of the State to society, in particular to the lower and middle classes, also became an essential element in the search for equitable development. In terms of strategies, the development of human resources was seen as an essential component of both equity and democracy.

2. Activities of ECLAC

35. The Social Development Division of ECLAC was principally involved in studies on the main changes in the social structure at the regional level, the characteristics and orientations of strategic social groups, the various modalities of popular social participation and alternative forms of association, the changes in the orientation of social and economic trends in Latin America in relation to styles of development, and the evolution of social policies in the countries of the region.

36. As a result of research activities, technical publications and reports were issued on the following topics: the dynamics of social deterioration in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1980s; a hopeful vision of democracy; economic structure, social relations and equity; specificity of the State in Latin America; continuity and change in the role of the State in Latin America; social control and ecopolitics in Brazil; the institutional dimension of the Amazonian ecological disaster: bureaucracy, diplomacy and ecopolitics in Brazil; economic transformations and social groups in Chile; the crisis and policies for urban housing in Latin America; changes affecting the social structure and social actors; the challenges of planning in the face of the development crisis: social organizations, democratization and social justice; current socio-economic dynamic in Costa Rica and the options for social

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*A report on ECLAC activities in the subprogramme on integration of women in development is rendered annually to the Commission on the Status of Women.

development at the end of the twentieth century; Peru in the 1990s: a possible way; development with equity: decision-making process, formulation of policies and social development in Latin America; social policies in a time of crisis: some Latin American experiences; human resources, poverty and development strategies; population, work force and the under-utilization of human resources in Latin America; the development of human resources for the articulation between productive modernization and social integration; main social tendencies in Latin America in the 1980s; the State and the formulation of social policies in Latin America: guidelines for the study of the decision-making process in the health sector; formulation of an analytical typology for the Latin American countries: productive structure and styles of development; options and false dilemmas for the 1990s: the new and the old in social policies in Latin America; organization of the health sector: distributive effort and equity; economic migrations and social impact in Central America; consequences of Brazil's recession in the 1980s: socio-demographic indicators; the heterogeneity of poverty in Montevideo; statistical information on basic education and social conditions in Montevideo households; models of socialization in Latin America and the Caribbean: documentary research; options for the execution of social policies in Latin America and the Caribbean; the ecopolitics of the Amazon's destruction; the ecopolitics of sustainable development: a Latin American vision of the global environmental agenda; decentralization in Latin America: current problems of selective social policies; democracy and sustainable environment in Latin America; poverty and sustainable environment in Latin America: problems and political options; social policies and social development in the beginning of the 1990s; equity: conceptual aspects and future tasks; the role of the State in changing production patterns with social equity; social and economic significance of drug abuse and illicit traffic in Latin America and the Caribbean; and indicators of socio-economic development for 1950-1980.

37. A major new output is the new Report on the Social Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, the first issue of which was prepared at the end of 1990. The Division is also preparing four national studies on social policies (Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) and a series of reports on national social expenditure in Latin America. A technical report on social images of modernization and technological transformation was completed. Similarly, a sales publication was issued on Occupational Transformation and Social Crises in Latin America and another book entitled The 1990s: Development with equity? was published jointly with the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences. In addition, two technical reports on the magnitude of poverty in Latin America in the 1980s and an estimation of the magnitude of poverty in Chile were prepared by the Statistical Division of ECLAC.

38. During the period several seminars and regional meetings were organized by ECLAC: Social Development Options for the 1990s (San José, Costa Rica, 15-18 November 1988); Latin America and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (San José, Costa Rica, 8-12 May 1989); Development, Democracy and Equity: the experience of Sweden and Latin America, organized in collaboration with the International Centre of the Swedish Workers' Movement (Santiago, Chile, 29-31 May 1989); International Conference on the Social Economy Sector and Equitable Development, organized in collaboration with the General Confederation of Co-operatives of Chile and the Ibero-American Co-operation Institute of Spain (Santiago, Chile, 20-22 June 1989); Industrial Restructuring and International Competitiveness: the Case of Italy, organized in collaboration with the Joint UNIDO/ECLAC Division of Industry

and Technology (Santiago, Chile, 20-21 July 1989); and an expert working group meeting on social aspects of changing production patterns with social equity (Santiago, Chile, 13 September 1990).

39. Finally, advisory services were rendered to the Governments of Argentina (social policy proposals); Belize (identification of the most important social problems); Bolivia (elaboration of social policies); Costa Rica (formulation of social policies); Ecuador (strategies and planning social development, in collaboration with UNESCO); and Venezuela (formulation of social policies).

B. Youth

1. Major issues and recent developments

40. Among the major issues affecting youth in the region were the continuing economic crisis, which affected access to and quality of education and productive employment, and a weakening of traditional mechanisms for social and occupational mobility.

2. Activities of ECLAC

41. During the biennium 1989-1990, policy-oriented research was carried out on the situation and problems of youth during the decade of the 1980s. Computer analysis of household survey data from several countries in the region in different years concentrated on changes in education, economic activity, occupational status and income of subgroups of youth by age, sex and rural/urban residence. Interpretation of these findings concentrated on policy implications of recent trends and on proposals for action.

42. As a result of research activity in the field of youth, technical publications were issued on the following topics: integration of young people into Latin American societies: problems and prospects; regional issues in Latin America and the Caribbean on co-ordination of integrated youth policies and programmes; changes in Latin American youth in the 1980s in education and occupational status; objectives and conceptual basis of the design of the National Youth Survey in Uruguay; Problems of Youth in Central America and the Caribbean Basin (book published jointly with the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences; and the search for new equations for the incorporation of youth in the development process.

43. The following meetings were held by ECLAC in the field of youth: an interagency meeting on youth in Latin America and the Caribbean (Quito, Ecuador, June 1990); a workshop for non-governmental organizations in the field of youth with representatives of the National Institute of Youth of the Government of Chile; and an informal meeting of specialized agencies with representatives of the National Institute of Youth of the Government of Chile, both at ECLAC headquarters at Santiago, Chile. Technical assistance was rendered to the Government of Uruguay on the design and application of a national youth survey.

C. Aging

1. Major issues and recent developments

44. Among the major issues and recent developments in the field of aging in Latin America and the Caribbean were, on the one hand, the accelerating

process of population aging now affecting almost all countries in the region and, on the other hand, the double crisis of economic growth and government finance. Living standards of the elderly, their opportunities for productive employment and retirement benefits were adversely affected, particularly as social security and pension fund systems also went into crisis in most countries of the region in recent years.

2. Activities of ECLAC

45. Policy-oriented research was carried out on the situation of the elderly in Latin America. Emphasis was placed on economic conditions, types of household of the elderly, and problems of social security. As a result of these research activities, technical reports were issued on the following topics: the elderly in Latin America as a strategic sector for social planning in the 1990s; living conditions for the elderly: development and family context; social security and the problems of old age in Latin America; aging in Latin America: the need for a social agenda; and social and economic issues of social security for the elderly in Latin America.

IV. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

A. Social development and welfare

1. Major issues and recent developments

46. The decade of the 1980s was characterized by severe and progressive deterioration in practically all facets of Africa's socio-economic development, eroding many of the impressive gains achieved in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The result was human suffering and misery on an unprecedented scale. The unyielding crisis was the consequence of a number of internal and external factors. On the endogenous side, there were structural imbalances and weaknesses of the African economy and domestic policy failures. The coalescence of these factors allowed persistent differentials between rural and urban areas to continue unabated, giving impetus to massive rural-urban migration, which in turn explains, to a large extent, the low productivity of the rural sector, culminating in severe food crisis and food insecurity. Disproportionate attention directed towards a few large-scale manufacturing industries, and widespread application of import-substitution, based on capital-intensive technologies, did not adequately respond to the need for employment creation and labour absorption. Thus, high levels of unemployment, especially among youth and to some extent women, remained throughout the 1980s. Natural calamities, such as severe and persistent drought, cyclones and locust infestations resulted in mass starvation in the affected countries. The crisis was worsened by incessant conflicts, civil strife and the destabilization policies of apartheid South Africa all of which culminated in a massive refugee problem and displacement of a large number of persons. Also, there was a lack of demographic transition, as the population continued to increase at the rapid rate of over 3 per cent per annum, thereby exerting pressure on the already limited and overstretched infrastructural facilities, especially in the areas of education, health, employment and housing.

47. On the exogenous side, worsening terms of trade, the result of a persistent fall in prices for Africa's primary commodities, were compounded by an inhospitable international economic environment. Africa's external debt burden escalated from $US 48 billion in the late 1970s to $US 250 billion by the end

of the 1980s, representing 99 per cent of total gross national product (GNP). The debt service ratio of sub-Saharan Africa increased from 11 per cent of total export earnings at the beginning of the 1980s to 27 per cent in 1988. At the same time, external resource flows decreased from $US 21.2 billion in 1982 to $US 18 billion in 1986, thus falling below the mark that could offset the fall in export earnings. The situation was exacerbated by the widespread implementation of orthodox structural adjustment programmes, with devastating effects on the social sector, especially health, nutrition, education and employment. The implementation of stabilization and adjustment régimes, without due cognizance of the social impact of these measures, has been seriously questioned because of their negative impact, particularly on women and children.

48. In order to redress the situation and redirect adjustment and policy reform measures, to strike a balance between the economic and human and sectoral dimensions of development, various policy strategies have been adopted in the region. The most recent ones include the Khartoum Declaration: Towards a Human-Focused Approach to Socio-economic Recovery and Development in Africa (A/43/430, annex I); the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (A/44/315, annex)); the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation; 2/ and the African Charter for Social Action, adopted by the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs. These documents emphasize the interdependence between the economic factors and the human and social dimensions of development, the need to involve people in development efforts as both participants and beneficiaries, and the need to balance resource allocations.

2. Activities of the Economic Commission for Africa

49. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1987/39, the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) prepared a comprehensive report on the critical social situation in Africa as an annex to the 1989 Report of the World Social Situation. 3/ In it, the impact of the African economic crisis on living conditions in the region was analysed and directions and strategies in policy and planning for arresting the situation were indicated. As contributions to the 1989 and 1990 issues of the economic report on Africa and the 1988-1989 economic and social conditions in Africa and the publication Beyond Recovery: ECA Revised Perspective of Africa's Development 1988-2008, the secretariat provided an analysis of the human and social dimensions of Africa's development in the light of the negative consequences of the 1980s crisis. It also reviewed current efforts and initiatives to mitigate the severity of the crisis in order to achieve a more holistic approach to self-reliant and self-sustaining development.

50. In preparation for the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs, which the secretariat organized in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity at Arusha on 27 and 28 October 1989, several working documents were prepared, including a report on social development activities during the period between April 1985 and September 1989, a summary of social trends and major social development problems in Africa, and a report on the implication of social conditions, trends and problems, in which attention was paid to countries affected by drought, desertification and the refugee situation. The major outcome of the Fifth Meeting was the African Charter for Social Action, which sets out principles, objectives and strategies as the basis for social policies and action programmes at the national and regional

levels. In addition, a technical publication entitled Guidelines and Strategies for Enhancing Popular Participation Particularly for Rural Women and Youth in the Development Process in Africa was completed and widely disseminated to member States.

B. Youth

1. Major issues and recent developments

51. From demographic data it has been estimated that the youth population (between the ages of 15 and 25) in the African region is 20-30 per cent of the total population and the indications are that it will most probably exceed this figure by the turn of the century. Policy and programmes so far undertaken by African Governments have not yet, however, matched the growing needs, problems and aspirations of youth in the region. Youth unemployment and underemployment continue to rise. The exodus by young people from rural areas in search of better but highly competitive and limited job opportunities and social amenities in the urban centres continues to increase. Juvenile delinquency and criminality, including those associated with drug abuse, are increasingly becoming major concerns in several African countries. School drop-out rates have increased, particularly in the face of universal primary education and higher enrolment at the primary level without corresponding increases at the higher levels and in technical and vocational institutions. The health of young people in the region also poses a major challenge to African countries. As a sexually active population group, youth is highly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV-AIDS.

52. The economic and social crisis of the 1980s has aggravated an already explosive situation: youth, as one of the most vulnerable population groups, has been hard hit by such measures as the reduced allocation of resources to social services, including education, health, housing, water and sanitation. Africa's achievement of the objectives of recovery and self-sustaining, self-reliant and long-term development will largely depend on the quality of its human resources; youth is Africa's reservoir of human resources, to whom the future well-being of the region will be entrusted. It is imperative that increased efforts and action be taken now and in the future to promote the effective mobilization of youth in Africa's development effort and to provide for their needs and protect their welfare. The Fifth Meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs called upon African Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to accelerate the implementation of the African Regional Plan of Action on youth 4/ and the guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth (A/40/256, annex).

53. In addition to these policy instruments, the regional strategies referred to in paragraph 50 above have made important policy pronouncements on specific population groups. All were endorsed by the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa.

2. Activities of ECA

54. Recent activities of the Commission concentrated on the preparation of studies and technical publications. To facilitate communication among youth organizations and between these organizations and other bodies involved in the field of youth, the secretariat compiled a directory of youth organizations in African countries. A study on the impact of rural youth employment programmes

on rural development analysed the extent to which rural programmes designed for young people had contributed to overall rural development efforts and their relevance to national development policies directed to the rural population. The survey of juvenile delinquency, crime and justice in the light of socio-economic conditions revealed that juvenile delinquency and crime were becoming increasingly grave problems in African countries and required more serious attention by all concerned. A study on the administration of juvenile justice in Ghana and Zimbabwe indicated the need to devise more diverse, diversionary and alternative approaches to dealing with the question of juvenile justice. The secretariat also prepared reports on the role and effectiveness of national youth organizations in the mobilization of youth for development and on youth policies and programmes as reflected in national development plans. Moreover, it contributed to and participated in the Expert Group Meeting on the Development of United Nations Standards on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency and the Interregional Preparatory Meeting on the Prevention of Delinquency, Juvenile Justice and the Protection of the Young, held in 1989 at Vienna and Riyadh respectively.

C. Aging

1. Major issues and recent developments

55. In the traditional African family, the elderly are accorded a privileged position. The process of modernization, however, manifested in increasing urbanization, industrialization, rates of rural-urban migration and changing family structures - particularly the increasing nuclearization of the family - is gradually transforming the unique position of the elderly in society.

56. At the same time, because the aging have been the smallest and least visible of the population groups in the region, little has been documented about their demographic, social and economic conditions. This situation will inevitably change. The Fifth Conference of Ministers of Social Affairs urged that member States should pay more attention to the status of the elderly, in the context of the International Plan of Action on Aging. 5/ Though in some countries it is not yet apparent, aging will undoubtedly emerge as an imposing issue in the near future.

2. Activities of ECA

57. The Commission's activities in the field of aging have been limited. During the biennium 1989-1990, a number of case studies were undertaken on the situation of the aging population, analysing national policies relevant to education, health and nutrition, housing and social security for the elderly, and demographic features and national infrastructure dealing with living conditions for the aging in the context of the family and community. It is envisaged that future activities in this field will be undertaken in the context of the forthcoming International Year of the Family.

D. Disabled persons

1. Major issues and recent developments

58. The total population of the African region is currently estimated at 591 million. Applying the criteria that 7-10 per cent of a given population may be disabled, then the disabled population in Africa ranges from 41.4 to 59.1 million, a figure exceeding the total population of many individual

African countries. This estimate might actually be conservative, given the prevalence of some of the root causes of disability in the region. Disability may be a result of inadequate programmes of primary health care, maternal health care and related services; frequent resurgence of endemic and epidemic diseases; undernourishment and starvation resulting in severe malnutrition and the curtailment of the body's natural defence mechanism; natural calamities, including repeated floods in some areas and droughts in others; environmental hazards, particularly those occasioned by heavy industries; various forms of accidents; and armed conflicts between nations, civil strife and wars of liberation.

59. The absence of adequate programmes and services for the prevention of disability and for the economic, social and medical rehabilitation of the disabled compounds the problem in the region. The availability of sufficient resources is crucial to the effective delivery of programmes and services. Unfortunately, the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) has coincided with a period of social and economic regression in the region. As a result, the resource base of most African countries fell sharply in the 1980s, resulting in serious cutbacks in allocations. Under these circumstances, it was difficult for many African countries to attain the objectives of the Decade and to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons 6/ to any appreciable degree in spite of their best efforts.

2. Activities of ECA

60. The Secretariat focused its attention on promoting the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons 6/ and the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992). In order to publicize the Decade and the World Programme of Action, a newsletter entitled "equal time" was launched and circulated widely to member States and other organizations involved in the field of disability. Besides promoting public awareness of the needs and situation of disabled persons in the region, the newsletter serves as a medium of exchange of information, experience and ideas on disabled persons and the various activities undertaken in the various African countries for their benefit. A directory of institutions, associations and organizations for disabled persons in African countries, their objectives, activities and accomplishments, was completed and disseminated. A report was prepared on the causes, types and prevalence of impairment and disability in African countries, in the light of adverse socio-economic conditions, focusing on Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania. Among the major findings of the report was the fact that, in spite of efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations in the two countries to provide services to the disabled, those efforts were not commensurate with the needs and problems of the growing number of disabled persons.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1988, Supplement No. 11 (E/1988/35), chap. IV, resolution 274 (XLIV).

2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1990, Supplement No. 13 (E/1990/42), chap. IV.

3/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.IV.1.

4/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1984, Supplement No. 11 (E/1984/21), annex I.

5/ See Report of the World Assembly on Aging, Vienna, 26 July-6 August 1982 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.82.I.16), chap. VI, sect. A.

6/ A/37/351/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, annex, sect. VIII, recommendation 1 (IV).